THE MAY-QUEEN:

A PASTORAL.

THE WORDS BY

HENRY F. CHORLEY,

THE MUSIC BY

WILLIAM STERNDALE BENNETT,

MUS. PROF. CANTAB.

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CHARACTERS.

May-Queen..... Soprano.

Lover..... Tenor.

Queen..... Contralto.

Captain of the Foresters (*as Robin Hood*)... Bass.

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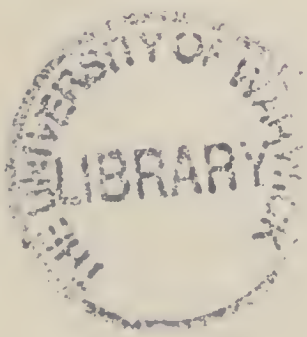

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THE MAY-QUEEN.

CHORUS.

Wake with a smile, O month of May,
  Wake with a smile of pleasant cheer:
Fill with thy breath the hedge-row spray,
  Tune with thy pipe the river clear:
For Beauty's carpet gaily strow
  The velvet green with daisy gems;
For fairer show is not below
  Than English meadow by the Thames.

Come hither, young! come hither old!
  With lissom bows and ribbons new,
And sheaves of cowslips pale as gold,
  And hawthorn pearly as the dew,
And violets we may smell, not see,
  And blue-bells nodding on their stems:
More bright May-tree there must not be
  Than ours beside the royal Thames.

SOLO—Recit.—Soprano.

(*By a Singer, from her place in the Chorus.*)

Now that the tree is drest—begone
  And hither bring the Queen of May,
With rebeck and with roundelay.

RECIT.—Tenor.

Lover.

Why must I linger here alone,
  Who love the maiden best of all?
I dare not look her face upon,
  Nor see her eye upon me fall
With coldness worse than angry scorn:—
O woe the day when I was born!

AIR—Tenor.

O meadow clad in early green !
O river gently flowing by !
Remember all you erst have seen,
And to my mournful plaint reply.
For well ye know the one dear name,
So deeply carved on many a tree ;
And well the face that hither came,
Through morning dew, to smile on me !

Go crown her, all ye starry tears,
By eyes of envying rival shed !
Go lull her, all ye sighs and fears
Wrung by her frown from hearts that bled !
Go tell her pride, when she goes by,
I'll lay me down on earth and die !
But never hope, when all is done,
To melt her cruel heart of stone ;—
O mournful May !

CHORUS.

O melancholy plight
Of undeserved decay !
Can fancy thus delight
An honest love to spite
And folly win the day ?—
Behold him, late so bold,
How pallid and forlorn !
I would not have the gold
Of Ind one thousand fold,
To have with it her scorn.

CHORUS.

With a laugh as we go round
To the merry, merry sound
Of the tabor and the pipe,
We will frolic on the green ;

For since the world began,
And our royal river ran,
Was never such a May-day,
  And never such a Queen!

SOLO—Soprano.

May-Queen.

With the carol in the tree
And the blooming of the lea,
And the riot of the bee
  Is my merry reign begun:
And my people, one and all,
Shall keep revel at my call,
Till my faded garment fall
  At the setting of the sun.
I have welcome and relief
For the lover full of grief,
Howsoe'er the wingèd thief
  In a snare his heart would bind;
For the April is away
With her tears for every day,
And beneath the moon of May
  Even cruel maids are kind.

Lover.

Yet hear me, ere the dance begin;
One word—*but* one———

May-Queen.

Good morrow, friend,
What would ye now?

Lover.

Have pity, end
This long, long play of cold disdain,—
Have pity on my weary pain!

MAY-QUEEN.

Come, that reproachful frown lay by.

LOVER.

Why hast thou changed thy fancy?

MAY-QUEEN.

—Why?—

DUET—SOPRANO AND TENOR.

MAY-QUEEN.

Can I not find thee a warrant for changing
  Up in the firmament, down in the flower,
Round in the breezes for evermore ranging
  City and wilderness, ocean and bower?
Till the wild wind with its messages laden
  Thou canst set free or control with a span,
O! for inconstancy blame not a maiden,
  Nor force her heart to do more than it can!

LOVER.

Why do you cruelly frown on and fly me,
  Wither my heart and bewilder my brain—
Why are you beautiful but to destroy me,
  Why, being tender, delight in my pain!
Can you behold, without memory's upbraiding,
  Eyes that are dim as mine, cheeks grown so wan?
O! of each vow that is broken by maiden
  Love keeps a record more sternly than man!

LOVER.

O! so soon to cast me by
  For an idle fantasy!
Were we not brought up together,
  Sharing storm and summer weather:

O'er the same clear river leaning,
In the same brown harvest gleaning.
Homeward hand in hand returning,
The same stars of evening learning,
Needing neither oath nor vow?—
Why is all forgotten now!

May-Queen.

Clear that doleful, frowning brow,
'Tis no day for pining now?
All this precious sunshine losing;
What if I so fickle be,
Dance with other swains than thee,—
Is it manly to lament?
No—another partner choosing,
Thou be lightest in the ring—
Smile the kindest, loudest sing,
Only for my punishment.

May-Queen.

Can I not find thee a warrant for changing
Up in the firmament down in the flower,
Round in the breezes for evermore ranging
City and wilderness, ocean and bower?
Till the wild wind with its messages laden
Thou can'st set free or control with a span,
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RECIT.

MAY-QUEEN.

But enough—my people gay
Clamour for their Queen of May,
And here come the foresters—

LOVER.

Led by yonder boastful stranger—
And the false one thus can tell
I must bid my hope farewell
Without blushing, without anger!
What a heart of stone is hers!

BALLAD—BASS.

ROBIN HOOD.

'Tis jolly to hunt in the bright moonlight,
When a man can crouch in the six-foot fern!
And the cold crisp air of the autumn night
Makes the outlaw's faggot more clearly burn.—
After prayers (Heaven bless him!) the fat red priest
Talks big of his park as he sits at his feast:
There is not an abbot from sea to sea
But keepeth the best of his deer for me!

'Tis merry to spend in the broad, broad town,
Where the mayor snores loud o'er his cups of wine,
And the mercer to clothe us must needs roll down
His wool and his velvet so superfine.
Let the mayor (Heaven bless him!) so gravely sleep,
Let the mercer boast of his vaults so deep,
And seal up his chests with its padlocks three:—
There still is a bag of his gold for me!

'Tis bonny to feast in the gay, gay bower,
To the harp and the lute and the love-sick horn,
Where they sing and they dance, till the mirk night hour
Is busy as noon, and as blithe as morn;

And the Earl (Heaven bless him !) must needs commend
His Lady to smile on his trusty friend !—
There's never a lady of high degree
But hoardeth her kindest of smiles for me !

MAY-QUEEN.

Methinks your song is something bold—

ROBIN HOOD.

O ! not too bold for beauty's ear :
I am no shepherd-lover cold,
But a brave gallant forester !

LOVER.

Prithee, be warned !—

ROBIN HOOD.

What doth he here,
This moon-struck boy that loiters near ?

TRIO—SOPRANO, TENOR, AND BASS.

ROBIN HOOD.

Shall a clown that beauty wear
That would grace the home of Pride ?
Shall those eyes beyond compare
An unseemly cottage hide ?
Rather trust to me the fate
Of thine heart and of thine hand :
And I'll raise thee to the state
Of a lady in the land !
Then, if Love thou wilt obey,
When the world asleep is laid,
Through the moonshine steal away
To the hawthorn in the glade.

MAY-QUEEN.

Can a simple maiden hear
  Such a tongue and feel no charm ?
E'en though Prudence in her ear
  Mutter low a wise alarm :—
What a mien of proud estate !
  What a voice of sweet command !
Dare I trust him with the fate
  Of my heart and of my hand ?
No ! my love's last word by day
  Must in holy church be said ;
So—I'll even keep away
  From the hawthorn in the glade.

LOVER.

Can a virgin heart be won
  By a mien so full of guile,
And a soft and honeyed tone
  And a dark deceitful smile ?
O the love that scarce will woo,
  So impatient to command,
Is a love one day to rue,
  Be its gilding e'er so grand—
Ere thou trust him with thy fate,
  O beware ! unthinking maid,
Lest repentance come too late,
  When no friend is nigh to aid !

ROBIN HOOD.

And now the greenwood King shall claim
  Sweet welcome from the greenwood Queen !

MAY-QUEEN.

Not on my lips, bold man—

CHORUS.

For shame !

LOVER.

Not while I live to stand between
The wolf and lamb !—Here's jest for jest,
As this stout blow shall well attest !—

CHORUS.

Part them !

ROBIN HOOD.

And must I bear a blow ?

CHORUS.

A blow !—Alas ! what hast thou done ?

LOVER.

Made yon disguised traitor know
He shall not feign and fawn and lie
And her true love stand tamely by !

CHORUS.

Ill-fated boy—begone !
  For hast thou never heard
  The hand that draweth sword
Against his bitterest foe—
  Even on mischief bent—
Or striketh him a blow
  Upon the royal land,
The Law, for punishment,
  Doth claim that hand ?—
Fly ! ere 'tis all too late—
  O wretched morn of May !
Hence ! poor unfortunate !
Speed !—ere they bar the gate—
  Hide thee ; away ! away !

Flourish of Trumpets.

SOLO—Bass.

(*By a Singer, from his place in the Chorus.*)

Place for the Queen!

CHORUS.

Too late!

PAGEANT MUSIC.

Chorus.

Hark! their notes the hautboys swell!
Breathing love and breathing joy:
Hark! the trumpets pierce the sky.
Louder than old Triton's shell,
To proclaim our Lady nigh!—
And amid the sunny air,
And along the wave serene,
Echo, too, will have her share,
Singing—"Glory to the Queen!"

Thames is proud and well may be,
Since the waves began to flow,
And a river he did grow,
Never did the greybeard see
Such a bright and royal show:—
All that is not chaste or fair,
Hence away! and hide unseen,
Banished from the presence rare,
Of old England's gentle Queen!

Queen—Contralto.

What mean the angry sounds we heard?
The faces all by passion stirred?—
Are brawlers here?—

CHORUS.

A strife between
Two gallants for our May-day Queen!
And this is he who struck the blow.—

QUEEN.

Upon our lands !—On May-day too !
As we are Queen, shall Justice do
Its work.—Hence with him !

MAY-QUEEN.

O my liege lady ! only hear
  The pleading of repentant shame !
On me let judgment fall severe,
  Whose vanity is all to blame ;
If, dazzled by my mimic state,
  His loving heart I madly tried,
Hear me declare, alas ! too late !
  I love but him, and none beside.—
With breaking heart, on bended knee,
I pray for grace.—O set him free !

QUEEN.

Which is the other ?

CHORUS.

Stand aside !—

(*To the Queen.*)

The one who seeks his face to hide.

QUEEN.

(*To Robin Hood.*)

What ? *you*, my Lord, in vile array !
What would your plighted lady say ?
You to a village girl descend !—
Shame ! from our presence !—Hence ! Amend !

(*To May-Queen.*)

For you, my maiden, all too gay
To wear again the crown of May,
Wed him at morn, your folly o'er—
And trifle with true love no more!
Lead on, my Lords!

CHORUS.

God save the Queen!
So gaily ends the troubled scene.

CHORUS—FINALE.

And the cloud hath passed away
That was heavy on the May:—
And the river floweth fair,
And the meadow bloometh green:—
They embrace no more to part,
While we sing from every heart,
A blessing on the bridal!
A blessing on the Queen!

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